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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 003354

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [TH](#)  
SUBJECT: BANGKOK HEATS UP -- PRO-THAKSIN PROTESTERS  
CHALLENGE CNS

REF: A. BANGKOK 3278 (THAKSIN RALLY PLANS UNCLEAR)

[1](#)B. BANGKOK 3210 (THAI JUNE 11 ROUNDUP)

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Alexander A. Arvizu, reason 1.4  
(b) and (d)

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) Bangkok's Pro-Thaksin rallies are expected to reach a new high this weekend as protesters plan to march on Army HQ and perhaps Privy Councilor Prem Tinsulanonda's residence on Saturday. Thaksin abandoned plans to return home, citing safety concerns, but plans to address supporters via video conference instead. Although Council for National Security (CNS) Chairman Sonthi Boonyaratgalin has echoed police assurances that force will not be used against demonstrators, tensions in the capital continue to rise. End Summary.

THAKSIN'S HOMECOMING ABORTED

[1](#)2. (C) On June 14 former PM Thaksin Shinawatra announced through his lawyer that he will not return to Thailand, for the time being, following public pronouncements by both Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont and CNS Chairman Sonthi Boonyaratgalin that the government cannot guarantee his safety and dashing hopes by anti-government demonstrators that he will lead protests as early as this weekend. Thaksin's attorney told the media that his client "is not afraid to die", but does not want to do so "just yet". Pro-Thaksin rally leaders, calling themselves the "Democratic Alliance Against Dictatorship" (DAAD - REF A), have instead planned to broadcast a video conference from the deposed PM the evening of June 15 and claim Thaksin plans to defend himself against accusations of corruption. The ICT minister told us, and said publicly, that the government would not block the PM's broadcast.

MARCH TO ARMY HQ PLANNED

13. (C) The protesters have been attending daily rallies at Sanam Luang. Poloff observed at least 10,000 enthusiastic demonstrators the night of June 14 while some reports estimated that 15,000 had joined the protest on June 15. It may be that some of the protesters have been financially compensated for their attendance: a factory manager in the northern city of Chiang Mai, a hotbed of Thaksin support, told the Ambassador on June 14 his employees had been offered 1,000 baht (approximately \$30) to attend the rallies in Bangkok. However, many, if not most, of the demonstrators appear to genuinely believe in their cause and fervently support the deposed PM.

14. (C) Protesters have announced they plan to march on Army HQ and possibly the home of Thaksin nemesis Privy Councilor Prem Tinsulanonda on June 16. It is likely that rally organizers base their hopes for an impressive turnout on their ability to transport supporters to the capital. This has become increasingly difficult as army and police officials have prevented intending protesters from traveling to Bangkok in large numbers (REF A).

#### ARMY, POLICE PROMISE RESTRAINT

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15. (C) CNS Chairman Sonthi has assured the public that the army will not use force against demonstrators, possibly in response to DAAD accusations that the military was planning a violent crackdown. Additionally, at a June 15 briefing attended by DATT at the Supreme Command, Royal Thai Supreme Commander Gen. Bounsrang Niumpradit, a member of the CNS, told attaches that the police would have the lead in controlling the weekend demonstrations. Soldiers would be

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standing by in garrisons, only in case they were needed in a supporting role. Neither police nor soldiers would carry firearms. Police had been in touch with the protest leaders to ensure that no violence occurred. Gen. Bounsrang expressed confidence that the police were prepared to handle the demonstrations peacefully.

16. (C) After the briefing, the head of the Supreme Command's Foreign Liaison Department pulled aside US, UK and Australian attaches to ask how these countries would react if "something happened" and the government were forced to declare martial law. All the attaches warned that the RTG should do everything possible to avoid such an action as it would be considered a step backwards that would cause serious concern. DATT said that the RTG had sufficient means to respond to a demonstration without martial law. If the government did declare martial law, it would have to rescind it and return the situation to normal as soon as possible to avoid widespread criticism.

17. (C) Police contacts informed the RSO that as of COB on June 15 they expected about 30,000 demonstrators on Saturday evening. They anticipated that protesters would again march on Army HQ. However, unlike last week, when the crowd was allowed to surround Army HQ, the police now planned to stop them en route. They understand that, if stopped, the demonstrators plan to sit down and block traffic. (Note: The police assessment presumably comes from police contacts with the demonstrators referred to in para 5 above.) Officials have also installed barricades around Army HQ and access to the compound has been restricted.

18. (C) Police said that there was no current plan for a curfew. The government could invoke an emergency decree if things got out of hand, but exactly what the trip wire for this would be was not specified. Our police contact confirmed that the police would not carry firearms.

19. (C) Police confirmed a rumor that several trucks with loudspeakers were riding around Bangkok encouraging people to join the protest. Police told us that this action was

illegal, but they did not want to intervene and perhaps  
provoke a confrontation.

COMMENT

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¶10. (C) Although the threat of Thaksin's imminent return appears to have abated, the possibility that large demonstrations could lead to violence has increased levels of concern. The police and military understand that, if they are drawn into a violent response to the demonstrators, they will play into the protesters' (and Thaksin's) hands, evoking memories of the 1992 democracy demonstrations and discrediting themselves in the eyes of the public. The government is repeatedly pledging it will not use force, but much will depend on whether enough of the crowd is really determined to provoke a violent response. End Comment.  
BOYCE